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ALADDIN AND THE SNOW

Aladdin was jumping around in the snow. One of Agrabagh's golden scarabs had burrowed itself into his forehead, and now Aladdin didn't want to do anything except dig around and make big piles of snow.

"Do you think the boss is going to be ok?" Abu asked the Genie.

"Shhh! Keep it down. Remember what happened last time we tried to stop him?"

Indeed Abu did. It had been a pretty horrific scene. Aladdin started waving around his snow shovel with a diabolical fury, claiming that anyone who tried to stop him from accomplishing the Number One Goal would get his noggin' bonked and would never wake up.

Abu shivered and pulled his arms even tighter to his chest inside his vest.

The only one who seemed to be keeping his head above water was the carpet, who had always been the first to give up whenever Aladdin went into one of his rages, and was now frantically pushing snow in great lumps off of the ground, becoming rigid with frost in the process.

"If only we could move this snow from over here to over there... Yes, that would just about do it... wait, or do we need to be moving this snow over here...?" Aladdin mumbled to himself.

The carpet was desperately trying to catch up every time Aladdin changed his goal threads. If Aladdin's plan changed to moving a different patch of snow to another place and the carpet wasn't fast enough to keep up, Aladdin would momentarily stop digging to chase after the carpet, plunging the shovel with his full might into the ground trying to slice the already brittle carpet into pieces. The fact that he did this silently with a crazed look on his face unnerved all in the company.

Suddenly Aladdin stood up straight and paused for a moment. He stared off into the distance as if his mind had become a blank. Gradually, a twisted smile took hold before he turned and pointed at the Genie and Abu.

"You two! I want you to start eating as much snow as you can!"

The Genie pointed to himself with his jaw dropped while Abu just stood still and blinked.

The carpet started to sneak up behind Aladdin with a lead cup he'd stashed away in one of his folds. He raised it up to strike and thought, this is for his own good.

With unnatural speed, as if he had eyes in the back of his head, Aladdin swung around and grabbed the carpet. After struggling in the snow for a while, Aladdin pinned the carpet under a huge rock where he wouldn't be able to move.

"Now there's nothing standing between my master and his beautiful plan!" Aladdin shouted before he began digging again. "Now EAT!"

ALGORITHMIC EGRESS

The time came for Drip, just like it came for everyone else. It happened one night as Drip was getting off of the graveyard shift. He went out of the back, lit up a peyote cigarette, and dodged the garbage, pipes, exhaust vents, puddles and excrement that littered the little back alley as he walked toward the main drag.

Drip pulled his head to the left side, the muscles on the right had been tense for days. He ducked into Pepe's Liquor and Spirits for a pint of Mutagen, ramming his filthy finger into the bullet proof glass threatening Pepe that if he didn't sell him the juice, he'd smash through and grab Pepe by the neck.

Back on 54th, Drip propped himself up against a trash can, keyed the code for the release mechanism into the canister of Mutagen, and pulled out another Peyote cigarette. This was no jest. There was no point in going home. Nobody was waiting for him. Not unless you counted the rats nibbling away at the basement of his dreams. He certainly wasn't...

That's when the hotdog shaped flying craft came down out of the clouds. It was all chrome, and about 3 meters long. Drip and his buddy Chrag had talked about it the night before. Sometimes, your number was up, and Drip had definitely been feeling lately like his number was up. Too tired to even make a metaphor about TV reruns, Drip took one long, last drag from his cigarette, stood up and walked over to the hotdog.

ANCIENT

Some of the earliest known picture discs ever found were located in a cave in the Normandy region of France. Scientists estimate these picture discs to be at least 4,000 years of age through carbon dating techniques, which raises the real possibility that they were created by Neandertals, rather than modern humans.

Among the finds is a rare copy of Grog's, "Boom Boom Cave Party" and a limited issue of "Me Hunt, You Find Stick" by Crag. Although arrangements are typically sparse, one notable track featuring solely the sounds of human skulls crushed by rocks, musicologists praise the rich harmonies and deep lyrics found etched in these ancient 12 inches. One of the most lauded examples of early songwriting goes, "Fire Bad, Meat good, When I go back cave, Cave wife make me feel like I should" sung in a low-slung, gravelly tenor reminiscent of Grab's Lucky Strike period.

Of course, the real merit of these records are the embossed images found on the A sides. Dag's extended version of "RRRRRROOOOCCCCCKKKK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" is accompanied by a jaw dropping portrait of ancient astronaut fighter jets cleansing an entire valley region of some 20,000 neanderthals. Pink Floyd's "Bong-Bicycle" has an early print of M.C. Erectus' "Ants on a Thing".

One image that has gone on to influence generations of musicians well past the most recent ice age is known simply as the "Pterodactyl". It has been posited that this bleak imagery was designed by Frank Flintstone, however academia provides little concrete evidence for this theory. Despite its unknown genesis, the now iconic imagery displays the titular Pterodacyl mid MegaZord transformation, searing the flesh of a Reptilian Lars Ulrich predecessor with an energy beacon. On it's back appears a bare breasted Valkyrie strumming a lyre that is plugged into 20 bajillion or so Marshall Full Stacks. The expression on the Lars Ulrich prototype is one of divine serenity as his flesh is devoured by a trinity of Vivaldi, Crag, and Elvis Presley. The track itself, by Ching-Chong, is a twelve minute exploration into the genre that is now referred to as "Power Electronics".

Collectors have beganed hoarding this treasure trove of anthropological memorabilia alongside other period ephemera such as posters from Henge's Summer of Darkness of Ice and Joy tour. Expect high reserves at auction, and keep an eye out for the Smithsonian's Picture Discs of the Ancient French Coast exhibition.

BILBO

Bilbo packed away all his sorrows in a little blue bag, which he then threw into the bottom of the closet before boarding a Boeing 747 and flying to New Jupiter.

Somewhere over Neptune³ Bilbo felt around in his carry-on. he needed his stroganoff card to show the stewardess to get a free tuggie. It has to be here somewhere, Bilbo thought. However no matter how deeply, nor how greedily he dug, his greasy paw kept coming up with lintball after lintball.

Oh yeah, he remembered, it's in that blue bag. xXxSusieSuicidexXx used to give me tug-offs. Oh well, those salad days are long gone.

When the stewardess came by with her tug-claw, Bilbo had to hang his head and give the universal bu yao. A shuddering downward thumbthrust.

Seated next to ol' Bilbo was the most hideous Japanese slug anyone could ever hope to repress memories of. She was a gnarled old root of eastern ugliness. Sickened by her slanty-eyed, yellow dyed pile of face, Bilbo buried his head into the tray-table with unanticipated nausea. Trying desperately to salvage the situation, Bilbo once again rummaged around in his tattered nurse for anti-fuglies. However, these too were lurking deep in a bag called sadness. Bilbo had once used them on his third wife, Mizrabel, when trying to conceive a fourthson.

Ten minutes later, Bilbo's iPad battery died. Well, that's it for playing River Rabbit, was the fart of a thought that came next.

Somehow along the line, Bilbo decided his vacation would be worry free and full of joviality. Because of this he juiced his memory lump into a blue burlap sack with an S on it. No more thoughts of Deb, Peg or Barb. No more glances to the sully. No more wept tears 'pon a Danny Glover pillow. No more Danny Glover for that matter... Ol' Bilbo was a pulped, dehydrated sack of joy.

Walking down the aisle was a darth of beauty. However, Bilbo neglected to notice her coy passing glance, because he'd pushed thoughts of that into the big recycle bin in the sky too.

Then they entered hyperdrive¹² and all inflight entertainment was shut off to maintain life support.

oh well, he thought, only six more years until I get to New Jupiter.

DAD

Charles was spread out face down before me. I didn't have time to stop. I kept running.

We'd been selected for the Thirst Games months prior. We hardly knew each other then. Just two grumpy old geriatrics trying to live out the rest of their lives without kids getting on our lawns.

I could hear the robot in the woods behind me. The earsplitting racket sounded like bleak, endless sheets of metal being shorn apart by a giant's hands; it must've been it's buzzsaw arm ripping through the dense forest.

It had been Elane's sixth birthday. Folding tables were set up in the backyard and I was grilling synthetic protein cylinders on the Webster Zio. The next thing I knew, two nine foot tall robots burst through the wall and seized me.

"YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED. DO NOT RESIST"

Man could I go for a cold one, I thought as I scrambled through the undergrowth and over fallen logs. I was 64 years old, but staying active and busy my whole life meant I was hale and hardy. Those other ignorant slaves hadn't stood a chance, I thought. Suddenly, my surroundings grew quiet. The roar of the Combots disappeared and was replaced by the loamy quiet of the woods. I knew what this meant, terror seized me. The Combots were activating their Ultra Senior Citizen Sensors.

Two weeks ago, they dropped us, 20 or so oldsters, into the Dasani Biodrome. The mudmen got half the group right away, the rest of us slowly picked off, one by one, by Gloomy Gus' energy beam. Charles and I had formed a partnership early on, based on mutual survival. He supplied the Twizzlers and I staved off the goonies.

But Charles was gone now. Face-flat in the mud after a Combot got him with a zoomerang. It was just me Zordon now, and my moment of glory. The brain paralyzing screech meant the Combot had located me. I smiled from behind a friendly tree, and took off back toward camp. Crashing trees thundered behind me, the Combot was on the move.

I didn't feel old. I never had, not for a day in my life. My kids joked about it. They called me Ageless Zordon and Dustman, but it just made me smile and think about how lucky I was to have lived the life I had. Old age be damned I thought, I'll stop living when I'm dead. Which it turns out is exactly what the Combots had in mind...

Leaping over thick vines and dodging tree trunks, I scrambled back toward the trap. Charles and I, and another unfortunate comrade, had designed it based on our experiences in the second Vietnam War. The Combob had gained on me, it was practically on my ass. I could feel a heat begin to swell at my back. I heard a crackle, the sizzle-stick of the Combob extended out right behind me and sparking my beef tube. At the last moment I leapt over the pit and an instant later the Combob crashed down into it, unable to stop its breakneck pursuit. I stood over the pit with my hands on my hips, out of breath from the effort, but welling up with pride and some other feeling that comes from winning out in a fight for your life. As the Combob sputtered and short-circuited, flame and smoke escaped its blocky frame. Its robotic arms flailed back and forth. I leered over the pit to look straight into the failing Combob's cams. Looking past them I spoke directly to the observer on the other side.

"I'm coming for you next" I said right before the Combob went totally slack, powering down forever. As I did this, the smoke from the smoldering Combob rose to my nostrils, smelling, of all things, like a synthetic protein cylinder.

"Dear God, Susan call an ambulance, it's happening again. Dad! Can you hear me, it's me, Brim! Did you forgot to take your pills? Christ, every birthday it's like this!"

I just kept smiling at the sky, nothing could take my victory away from me.

FLEETWOOD

Fleetwood had been milling around for ages thinking solely about the Bud commercial that came on last night. "This bud's for you" he said outloud to nobody in particular. He picked up a clump of dirt and flung it across the barren field. Suddenly Hammerhead radioed him on the frequency reserved for matters of "that" kind.

"We've come across a possible source, coordinates 96delta, rigamarole beta, rotation 44 degrees"

Fleetwood hopped on his megabike and zoomed off toward the horizon.

Some derelict dirt gleaner standing by who observed Fleetwood passing at a speed somewhere between what the hell was that and instantaneous transit was picking his teeth with a shoot of wheat right before he turned around quicker than a dust devil and bolted off inside his hut. He knocked decades old copies of Playboy, of immense value value, which crumbled into sand as they fell off the desk, in the process of fumbling for the switch on the field destabilizer.

Fleetwood had the sensation of everything suddenly unfreezing around him, like a video that had been paused coming to life and melting into some data moshed texture error.

He was laying in the middle of a dirt cloud, clutching his right extensor grapple assembly in pain when an indistinct shadow came looming over him.

"Where were you headed in such a hurry?" chuckled the dry, dust choked breath of a Sandman.

Fleetwood, in a frantic attempt to unhook a bamboo throwing spear, felt a boot clamp down on the only part of him that still seemed able to move.

"That must be some ride you got there, fancy it's a megabike 9000" croaked the Sandman.

"I spit on you! ***kersplat***" went the Fleetwood.

"There's gotta be someone waiting for you on the other end with a whole lot of Big George's who'd pay for equipment like that. Say I'd let you walk

away in exchange for that Megabike and a ..."

"Go rigid at the bottom of Mount Pile!" sputtered Fleetwood.

"Hehe, bad move Buster." The Sandman walked toward the megabike lying on its side. He squinted at the gas tank to read the inscription below the symbolic ouroboros and crossed veils that read: Promised Sisters of Mercy Squad no. 420. Beware Sandmen.

"Gulp" gulped Vector the Sandman as a 120 pound anvil fell out of the sky and crushed him.

GIMME THE SAUCE

Mr. Big swiveled around in his huge leather armchair.

"I've been expecting you..." came from the shadowy figure behind the desk.

Frang approached, wrestling against the ropes tying his wrists together.

"That's right, I know all about Mrs. Watermelon. But we'll have time for that later. Take a seat. Have a cigar" the thug escorting Frang shoved him from behind, which somehow ended up with Frang in a highbacked chair in front of the desk.

He heard a couple of ice cubes plop down in a rocks glass. Mr. Big leaned forward and splashed in a few fingers of scotch; Frang's mind raced back to memories of better days.

"Here, help yourself" purred Mr. Big, reaching with the heavy bottle across the desk. Frang snatched it up and started guzzling it instantly.

"No, no, no... That won't do at all" Mr. Big snapped his fingers and a leather sack came down on Frang's dome.

"Hey, what'd you do that for?" Frang was leaning across the desk grasping for the receding bottle of sauce.

"It seems we've become at odds with each other over a certain small matter. To put it bluntly, I have something you want, and y-"

"Yeah, that bottle of scotch!" interrupted Frang, desperately struggling to reach his lanky arms across the desk.

"... and you have something I want..."

"I'll give you anything! Just gimme a sip" pleaded Frang, his midsection now plastered atop his side of the desk.

"Charming really. Megabyte?"

Behind Frang, who was now lifting his right knee onto the mahogany tabletop, came the ominous cracking of Megabyte's knucks.

"We'll keep it short then, lest my associate behind you lose his patience. We came across several interesting, ehem, items in your apartme-" Mr. Big was cut off again, this time by a glass paperweight smashing to the floor in the wake of Frang's wriggling body recklessly making its way over Mr. Big's various stationary.

"Hexadecimal, could you please do something about this idiotic clod?" Mr. Big was pinching the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger.

Frang was brought up by a powerful hand clutching his omnisuit, and plunked right back down into the chair, hands and feet still firmly bound.

"Hey that wasn't very nice! Come on man! Just gimme some of that sap, please?" this time Hexadecimal's brawny hands pinned him down by his shoulders.

"As I was saying, a certain property of mine has gone m-"

"OWWWW!" shouted Hexadecimal, "Boss, he bit me!"

At this point, Mr. Big could actually see Frang halfway across the desk, coming at him headfirst in a sort of frenzzied inchworm crawl.

Frang got to the point where he could just about reach the bottle and flopped down onto his side, violently gnawing at the ropes tied around his wrists and scattering stacks of papers. Megabyte leaned over only to receive a powerful kick against his ribs. Even a thug like Megabyte couldn't hold his constitution when attacked in surprise like this and fell backward clutching his midsection, Frang chewing and spitting out clumps of fibers all the while.

"That's it then," groaned Mr. Big, "If you want something done, you've got to do it yourself" He pulled open a drawer and extracted the very same tire iron that had, all those years ago, been his trusty side arm as he rose to power within the criminal underground. He kept it with him purely for sentimental value, but here it seemed fitting somehow.

Lost momentarily in thought, Mr. Big brought his mind back to the current situation to find that Frang had given up on the gnawing idea, and was now curled up in the fetal position glugging straight from the bottle like some psychotic infant. Mr. Big couldn't help but slap one big meaty palm

against his face and slowly pull it down while shaking his head pondering how in the hell he'd ever get his lost apartment keys back.

HETFIELD

Trujulio jumped off the stage just in time before the giant eruption. He raced outside to his nuclear thrash car and jumped in through the fused window. How many times had he told Hetfield not to try playing that solo on his own?

Minutes before, Jason Newsted had been standing in the crowd incognito wearing a ball cap and shades. Moments before the explosion he had been playing with his mustache, a sick grin betraying itself amongst the pandemonium. His worn armor, collected from detritus found in Toys-R-Us stores long ago looted gave him a sense of security though he stood in the eye of the thronging circle pit. Thousands of lines of code scrolled in front of his right eye on the shades' heads up display, mirroring the chaotic attendees of the concert. It was unscrambling launch codes for the derelict missile silo the band was playing on top of, one last unexploded dud from the Great Divide.

Lars of course, was backstage with 5,00 groupies, simultaneously keeping time in his avatar suit while grinning salaciously as he performed a dubious act with what had identified itself via IP handshake protocols as "VixZen6ty9er".

Only the core of the band was actually present onstage, namely a cyborg Hetfield that was more machine than man. Newsted glanced up as the last digit in the launch sequence was decoded, only to blink momentarily when nothing happened. Hetfield stepped forward to the edge of the stage and shouted in a synthetic voice sounding like bones crushed under Adidas GSG-9 combat boots, amplified to a neuron scrambling volume, "ZZzt-Brrrt-Gimme-zzzssshhh-Fue-ue-ue-ue **Click* *whirr* Gimm-zap-*sputter*-me-fire-Gimme*splork*splunk*that which I-zzzt-*backfire*Desire!"

-and the crowd exploded into utter chaos, ripping off their lead codpieces and dancing around the wreckage of a derelict Boeing 747.

Then Hetfield's one remaining human arm started a sequence of hammer-on, hammer-off, thumbing bass grooves on his suspended Ditch-Witch Signature Motograter B.C. Rich representing the culmination of post-war

pro-audio that sent thousands into a slow, gyrating mass of sensual rhythm.

"Yesssssss!" Newsted's tongue slithered uninhibited. "The final key in the Launch Sequence! The Benzer-Godel-Davinci Solo!" as just then the whole floor opened up and bone vaporizing fire issued forth from the hellacious maw.

"Not aga-a-*click**sputter*-gain! *honk*" thought Hetfield.

To Be Continued...

MAGRUDER'S WISH

It started when he was a boy. He was sleeping lightly one night in his bedroom decorated with Monster Jam posters and nestled sweetly in his black, green and purple Gravedigger pajamas. He woke up just as the moon reached its highest point in the big, black sky. Outside of his open window he could hear the deep rumbling of a big engine. He leaned out into the cool night air and below him, parked on top of his dad's car was Dennis Anderson himself, sitting high up in Gravedigger's cab.

"Daniel! Gravedigger's world needs your help!" shouted Anderson through his cupped hands.

Daniel, no longer woozy from waking, scurried down the carpeted steps of his house and through the front door onto the lawn.

"Hurry! Get in!" Anderson's arm came down to pull Daniel up, seeming to stretch magically as it lifted him up into the passenger seat where the belt buckle slid across Daniel's chest and locked into place all by itself!. ZAP and like that they were transported away to another world, full of adventure and danger, leaving only the smashed ruins of father's car behind as evidence.

Many years later, at a bank in Kissime Florida, a sharply dressed Daniel Magruder sat before a wide desk, desperate to pass his loan interview.

"The idea of a Monster Truck restaurant certainly has its merits and intriguing qualities. Let me think hmmm... It could work you know. This area loves family friendly restaurants with a good theme..."

"No, it's not Monster Truck themed!" Daniel slammed his fist into the mahogany desk. "It's Gravedigger themed... Well, no not exactly, it's themed after Gravedigger's universe. Wild Ford F-650s grazing, Mac Trucks lurking in the twilit forests for their supper. The dreadful cry of the fearsome Dumptruck's airhorn..."

"Mr. Magruder, I'm not sure I understand you entirely. Is this a children's television show that I'm not aware of or..."

"No no NO! Not at all. You see when I was a small boy, Dennis Anderson came to my house in the night and took me. We went to the Grave World, where Magnet Man had stolen all the big lug nuts. Alongside Gravedigger's friends Bigfoot and Snakebite, and former rivals Viper and Scooby Doo we stormed Mt. Skull and smashed his army of evil schoolbuses..."

"Mr. Magruder, none of this could possibly be true!"

"But it is! You have to believe me, for when I awoke many years later, having finally defeated the evil Magnet Man, the other boys I had met in my dream were there with me in the basement."

"I heard about that! You were one of those boys they found in North Carolina. You'd been missing for 14 years! My god. You know Mr. Magruder, you could actually be right. This could really work. OK! We'll do it. Congratulations Mr. Magruder!"

CHA-CHING!!!

MONKEY'S UNCLE

The Hammer of London was found by Bil and Mary Jefferson, a couple taking a hike one day in the woods behind their London, Texas home. It was a rock, yes a REAL rock, with a bit of wood sticking out of one end. They brought it home and put it on the mantle next to their shrine of Robert Downey Junior.

They loved that thing, cherished it, dreamed about it, told their coworkers about it, made matching t-shirts with photos of it; they'd even once taken it, hidden in a backpack, to a Robert Downey Junior flick. Therefore, the clever reader can deduce, were a bit miffed when they found eight year old Chavez going at it with a chisel one stormy October morn'.

Papa pulled back a delicious haymaker and crocked sweet little Chavez a nasty one, but the damage was done. There it was amidst the scattered gravel of a treasured dream, fractured to scraps of memory that fade one by one in the morning sunlight.

A hammer. A real live, old timey, whisky Pete, southerdough miner's daughter hammer. Pulling Chavez out of the way by his greasy hair, Papa picked up the hammer and examined it.

"Now how in the black pit of hell does a thing like this end up inside a thing like that?" he posited to his wife, holding the hammer out in one hand while gesturing toward it with a fat sausage finger of the other. He was glaring at her with the full intensity of his gaze, as if to say she'd better give him an answer, and quick.

Bil had almost gotten used to finding things in unexpected places, like the Newport cigarettes in his favorite ashtray, the frizzy hairs in the drain of the shower, the smell of some unidentified fragrance in the bedroom. Then there was his 200-pound post hole digger in his neighbor's garage, the dishes he'd been doing clean and neatly stacked along with the fuzziness of lost time. There were the mutilated cattle he'd find in the ravine, always after several days of hearing the same subtle pulsating tone emanating from under his bed. These kinds of strange, some might infer paranormal, events started around the same time that Mama Mary was puking her brains out in the mornings, leading to what may be one of the less

shocking developments of the story, namely the boy Chavez, who resembled his father in almost no way conceivable.

Mary blinked. This was it she gulped. She'd have to tell him one way or another. Now or never, the truth about Jose had to come out.

He was whistling as he stepped out onto the front porch through the screendoor, the brisk notes of La Cucaracha filling the valley stillness. The storm had passed and he lit up a dusty roach, smiling as he thought about how he was going to fuck with his neighbor Bill today. Maybe he'd feed spark plugs to dinosaurs until they croaked, the foreign artifacts fossilizing inside their corpses. At the same time though, how was he going to make sure Bil dug 'em up? Oh well, he figured, he'd cross that bridge when he came to it.

Jose was just about to switch on the time machine when Bil snuck up from behind and brought that big piece of black iron down onto his grimy bean, sending Jose into a crumpled mess on the Texas dirt (Jose was a bit oblivious afterall, having smoked that Austrian Bastard on the porch earlier). It was then that Bil glanced again at the inscription inlaid in fine ancient capitals on the hammer: "Your [sic] a monkey's uncle, Ese!"

"Learn English!" spat Bil, who dropped the hammer and shuffled off into the tornado that picked him up and rearranged him as a railroad before placing him back down some 20 miles away.

PICKY

Picky Penelope was practically a ghost by the time she got to have fourthmeal. Dinner felt like it had been ages ago, and she didn't have much for supper. Just a juicy leg, a tender strip and a blaster bowl. She pulled a New People's Republic Fun Buck from her purse and slapped it down on the counter.

"What kind of McDub would you like Miss?" asked the cashier.

"it doesn't matter Just feed me!" said ol' Penelope.

The cashier lifted up the dollar menu bazooka and aimed it straight at Penelope's now wide open mouth. She said the code word, 'black dawn', and the burger shot directly at Penelope's face. Penelope swallowed it whole, said "thanks a bazillion" and walked off.

Back at home Penelope decided she'd open up her copy of New People's Republic Romance Text 12 and read for a while.

Romantic Character #M-67r made a romantic gesture. Romantic character #F-8b was pleased.

No matter how hard she tried, Penelope just couldn't get in the mood though. Must be all that engine exhaust she thought.

Wait a second... Penelope suddenly awoke in her parked car inside her garage that was quickly filling up with carbon monoxide.

RIGG

30 minutes into the rift cycle, he felt it jabbing him from behind. He'd heard about these so called "Rift wigglers" a million times from Tryke, his tunnel buddy, but never once had he had to deal with one, in the flesh.

He picked up his 2 in 1 combo communicator and depressed the orange button. "This is Rigg, come in Rift Control. I've got a code 242 here"

"We read you Rigg. We're sending a probe down now"

Somewhat concerned by what Rift control meant by probe, Rigg scratched around behind him, trying to get a feel for whatever was squirming around in his suit.

Judging by the ride out, Rigg would probably have to wait at least 20 minutes before Rift Control's probe showed up, so he figured he might as well get used to it and get back to Scrimming.

Rigg set down his Samuel Jackson 5000 and started coding in the sequence for maximum detonation. Rigg figured that a uncontained fusion reaction from the 3,000 grams of deuterium in his power pack ought to be enough to not only completely destroy the Rift Wiggler, himself and the entire sector of Rift he was working on, but also disrupt any nearby stars, gravitational fields on which major systems relied, or even the entire Samuel Jackson Mining Corporation Operation.

Just before Rigg plugged in the final digit of the sequence, the probe arrived and whanged him on the head.

"ouch!" cried Rigg. "what the hell was that for?"

"You were about to blow the whole sector, you turkey!"

"I was? Hmm, yeah you're right. It seemed like a good idea..." replied Rigg in a daze.

"That's how those Wigglers work you know. Power of suggestion, mind control, they supplant notions into your cerebral cortex via the Pierre's Phantasy node"

"Yeah, what a hum dinger. Glad you got here in time" Rigg mumbled while rubbing the back of his head.

"Ok well why don't you take the rest of the shift. That was a close one. We'll go grab a beer or something" said the probe.

Good idea, thought Rigg, but something hovered on his periphery that just wouldn't let go of his attention. It smelled like, of all things, marijuana, and Rigg just couldn't figure that out for the life of him.

Until, Rigg remembered where he was, lifted the virtual reality visor, and resumed smoking his fat jay with gusto. "these games just keep getting better." he thought.

SATCHMO 1 (Satchmo's Surprise)

Satchmo was hiding in the coat locker at the Bing Bong club. He was supposed to go on in five, but there he was, poised among the evening jackets of men and women who were out on the town. As time slowly crept by, as it tends to do for someone with a plan and the need to wait for the right moment, Satchmo could hear the insidious whispers of an anxious crowd grow steadily toward concern.

Growing up, Louis Daniel Armstrong had it rough in turn of the century New Orleans. Born to a drunken father and some 737 brothers and sisters, it wasn't always easy for ol' Louie to scrape out his own place in the world. The mother whom Daniel had never known abandoned the family months prior to his birth, leaving tired old Billy-Goat Williams and his Old Crow and sink water to look after the growing family on his own. Spending the majority of his income on the aforementioned concoction, so called a "Bird Bath", meant money was tight for the Armstrongs. Willing to do his part, Louis "Satchelmouth" spent his days gleaning the cobbles for dropped change, bobbins of thread, bits of sponge, Indian arrowheads, fragments of meteorites, macaroni & cheese, or nuts and bolts to repair machines and stowing it all in his prodigious cakehole, thus earning him his first and longest lasting nickname.

Back in post-depression New York city, Louis hears a couple tire of the delay.

"If ol' Pops isn't going to show, we'll make like bananas" squawks the flapper.

"Make that a banana split!" barks Papa.

Giddy and expectant, Louie hunkers down even lower behind the coat check counter, the unconscious body of the coat check clerk snoring gently sprawled out next to the section of lead pipe beside him.

It wasn't until 16 that ol' Pops first contacted Morax, a creature from another dimension interstitial to our own constellation of Cancer but nestled within the brief period of time after the Big Bang when all four fundamental forces co-existed as one. In her third story French Quarter

flat, Morax inducted Satch into the apocryphal darkness of the Order of the Sable Lawn, leading him in rituals for enhancing knowledge of minerals, herbs, arithmetik, astrology, the clandestine art of Satchmo's Surprise and the ability to breath under water for five minutes.

The atmosphere of the club was turning to a disgruntled sense of dissatisfaction. The band had tried to make due with any part of their repetoir that could serve as a reprieve, having grown these chops as their boss tended more and more to bouts of tardiness. The couple from before had finally had enough though. They stood to their feet suddenly, glass rattling on their recently vacated table and stormed toward the coat check and exit. There they stood in tight lipped scowls, arms folded and coat check tags dangling from their fingers until...

"SURPRISE!" Shouted Louie popping up and blowing brashly at both of their faces through his trumpet.

THE DORK

The dork had a powerful nemesis on his tail. He ran around a corner and made a vow of exactitude. Glancing over his left shoulder, he could see the swirling mist of the approaching nemesis, his vision fogging over with the curse's dread. Checking his inventory, he found a Golden Shell Fragment. He crushed the brittle shard in curled fingers, the lacy cuff of his Singer's Dress illuminated by the charm's brief glimmer.

He lurched around the stone wall to face the prowling nemesis head on. In front, a set of crimson eyes, behind, the same...

"Hurckk. Double Nemesis! Nnnng" he gulped, running back behind the stone barrier.

His mind raced, desperate for any idea that would bring a ray of hope. The dork, eyes shut fast, found a precious spark hovering in the gloom. His cries rushed out across the expanse, telepathically signalling to Ray Dar, his champion of the Enslavement Dome. Ray Dar had seduced the dork on their first night, leading to a lasting burden of desire, allegiance and bondage.

The Dork's mind swelled with unspeakable darkness, a sure sign that Ray Dar's summon was near. Before him, a Veil of Tears miracle dimmed into ruddy dusk, and from it slipped a bare chested, rippling Apollo with the radiant silver head of an eagle.

"Ray Dar! You've come!" Glee modulated the Dork's exclamation into a shrill falsetto, a smile hidden abruptly by the Dork's graceful fingers. Ray Dar snorted and slumped through the opening.

Overcome with rapture, our reluctant hero hugged his legs tightly to his chest. "He still cares!"

From around the corner came the visceral sounds of doom, cold steel rending through armor and flesh. Shrieks of otherworldly agony filled the chasm. An angelic choir to the dork's ears.

Battered, drenched and stinking with the liberated bowels of his prey, Ray Dar slogged back through the stone arch, his greatsword spattered with the innards of the two Pursuers.

Grateful and filled with pride, longing and expectant, the dork extended his frail neck, eyes closed and lips pursed. He hesitated like this, his flaxen hair waving in the foul updraft of the abyss, until he felt his eyelids brushed by particles of ash that signaled a departing phantom. Ray Dar had apparated back to his own world...

"Fiddlesticks!" sighed the Dork, swishing his fist in an arc in front of his delicate bosom, a secret plan already condensing to find the next perilous scene of distress.

THE KING

They called him The King. Everyone knew he was the tip-top mover and shaker in all of Dagrobrag. He'd saunter through alley markets so narrow his shoulders would literally scrape up against vendor's hooked noses, but these vendors didn't care. They loved The King. His broad shoulders bashing their noses was like kissing the Blarney Rock for them. All day long The King would traipse up and down these tiny little narrow market alleys ramming his burley shoulders into noses. Crack, smash, bash, break. The streets were filled with the music of noses being tweaked by The King's manly frame.

"Did you hear, Moseh de La'llah's nose was broken yesterday by the King's glorious scapula!"

"Praise Bag'Dor!"

One day, The King decided he'd visit the market and load up on some sweeties. He marched directly toward the Medina of Fes et Ball'Bag. Stomping and kicking his way through the clogged zkak, he shoved idlers out of his way. Soon a grin grew on his goofy, cragged face. He saw a doofus, with a cart, slowly teeetering ahead in the intersecting alley. The King quickened his pace a bit, walking briskly up to man and giving him a swift boot in the ass. The man jumped a step forward and rubbed his sore posterior vigorously.

"Thank you sire!" exhaulted the dud.

At this The King's grin grew even wider and twistier.

Further down the alley two vendors were in the midst of a heated debate. Shouting and gesturing with their hands in a rapid and borderline incomprehensible Khaleeji, it gave The King a swelling of pride to live in such a thriving and lively city. As he approached, The King placed a broad palm behind each man's head and then bonked them together with a tremendous thunk.

"Holy Ahmed! Thank you for blessing me with darkness!" said one of the men who had been stricken with sudden blindness by the blow.

Making great time and feeling generally in high spirits, The King walked onward toward the Peddler If'mael's stall.

"Sugar dates, sugar dates and figs, sugar dates and pistacios!" sang If'mael. Hearing this sweet music, The King closed his eyes and reveled in the joyous sounds of Dagrobrag.

"Oh King! You exalt me by visiting this humble, untouchable wastrel's stall. A thousand kisses from the gods upon your sweet head!"

At this The King pulled out a gun from his waistband and shot the peddler, who grasped his chest and slowly slumped against the wall behind him. The King furtively glanced from side to side, stole a handful of dates and fled from the scene popping a few of the sugary treats he had taken into his mouth as he scrambled nervously away.

Abu watched his master sleeping from the windowsill, pleased to see his slumber so calm and apparently so non-violent, as Aladdin's face was glowing with a gentle smile from whatever dreams visited him.

THE PLEX

Siyang was happily tossing around the ball. This led to a stimulation of the plex. The plex was pleased. Siyang often questioned the nature of the plex, but was comforted at least by the plex's presence.

When the plex asked for something, Siyang was eager to respond, but his parents had warned him about the plex several times. Not yet having full control over his krang, Siyang was not in a position to obey either fully.

So it was that Siyang communed with the plex with an underdeveloped krang. The plex gyrated ceaselessly and Siyang could do little to limit his appeasement. Now the plex was demanding more fun cycles. Siyang grasped the handlebars of the seesaw and kicked his legs off the ground. The plex spread out some spores at this, and Siyang felt validated. He climbed the ladder to the small slide and zoomed down the metal ramp. At this the plex stingily withheld its spores.

Then Siyang climbed the really high ladder, the one that went up to the really BIG slide, the one that Siyang was afraid of. At the very top, Siyang could feel the plex quivering. He hesitated, anticipating the plex's release of spores. Thinking for a moment, Siyang decided to climb back down the ladder. The plex blinked.

Siyang then walked over to the swingset and kicked off. With each arc, the swing lifted higher and higher. Big puffs of spores came from the plex and Siyang smiled, then dragged his feet on the next downswing, slowing to a complete stop after only a couple more passes. The plex grew in frustration. Siyang could feel his Krang, mastery over the plex, growing incrementally.

At the top of the jungle gym, Siyang grabbed the fireman's pole. This one Siyang had NEVER tried because his kindergarden teacher told him about the last boy who went down it and how his leg bone ripped up out of his knee cap and knocked him in the chin after he recklessly slid down it too fast. How the boy had to writhe around on the ground screaming at the top of his lungs while buckets of hot blood streamed out of his ruined leg. Siyang lifted one leg off of the jungle gym, and the plex shuddered with anticipation. Siyang wrapped his lifted leg around the pole and leaned in

closer. The plex squirmed. Siyang hugged the firemans pole with both arms and pushed his grounded leg up onto its tippy-toe. The plex was about to rupture with nirvana. After holding this pose for a full ten seconds, Siyang was entirely back on the jungle gym with one swift movement, grinning.

"Are you some kind of asshole?!" shouted the plex.

THE SATCHMO 2 (Planter's Peanuts)

Louis Armstrong was sick of living in his older brother Neal's shadow. He was sitting around one day squeezing as much toothpaste as he could into his mouth when the idea hit him. He was so tired of "Neal this", "Neal that", "oh you must be Neal's brother!" or "Bugbear Brand Blood Substitute, the Blood Substitute Neal Armstrong chooses!". It was about all he could handle and that's why ol' Louie got the idea that he did.

Growing up all of the kids in the Armstrong family were known for their tremendous respiratory talents. Everyone's familiar with how Louie could breathe underwater for five minutes, but did you know about how the other children were able to burst hot water bottles by exhaling into them, start campfires with a few quick burps, make all the dishes and leftovers disappear after dinner with a sneeze or refill a car's gas tank simply by screaming at it? Well it was actually Neal's gift that garnered the most attention. He could hold his breath, some would say, for upwards of two and half minutes at a time! And this was in high school! Before you knew it, lil' Louie wanted to try and be just like his big brother Neal. That's why he began eating all the other kids in his class.

Ol' Louie had, in time, become pretty famous for the size of his gob. Soon there were sold out concerts, buffets and government blacklists around town with Louie's name all over them. One day, big brother Neal was watching TV when he got his own just desserts.

"Oo hun'ed ah nigh'y who, oo hun'ed ah nigh'y hee, oo huh'ed ah nigh'y hor" Neal watched as he saw his younger brother cramming peanuts into his mouth on TV. "..oo hun'ed ah nigh'y hix, oo hun'ed ah nigh'y ACHOOOO!" Peanuts went scattering everywhere. Neal watched his brother in the TV commercial's shoulders slump, a glum look coming over his face right before he picked up the closest peanut and popped it into his mouth and started counting from the beginning.

"Planters Peanuts, yeah, they're that good"

THE SHOWDOWN

"Guess who's back bitch!" Aladdin lowered the 357 squarely between Jafar's eyes.

Abu scrabbled up Aladdin's left leg to take a big bite, right before he got a knock on the noggin' from the butt of the pistol.

"Put it down Aladdin!" pleaded the Genie.

Aladdin fired off three shots directly at the Genie's forehead. The bullets shattered vases directly behind.

"Hss ss ss" laughed Jafar. "Smart boy, he's on my ssssi-" Jafar's hiss was cut short by his kneecap shattering as the fourth round was fired. Aladdin took another slug from the forty as he staggered forward.

"You throw me off my carpet, you shoot me off to the end of the world, you steal my GENIE from UNDER MY PILLOW" Twang! Another shot ricochets off a stone column. "You ASSHOLE, who do you think you're FUCKING WITH?"

Bang! A red and blue blur falls from the rafters. "Your fucking parrot is dead" Aladdin stumbles a few steps. When he pulls himself up on Jafar's cloak, slobber drips from his smiling teeth. His arm comes up with maniacal confidence and pokes the wide barrel against Jafar's nose. Tap tap tap.

"You think yous are the SHIT!? Yous think you are the Sultan of Aggrabagh?!"

"Hissss Bissss, Toil and Tumbo. Havoc, ravoc and mumbo jumbo-" Jafar's incantation comes out slow and agonized as he keeps one hand clasped to his oozing kneecap.

"Stop it! Stop that sorcerer heebie jeebie bull CRAP!"

Gusts of red mist begin swirling around Jafar's cape. "Abra Babra, Iago Rajah, babbling brook, Flamigo Trum-"

CLICK

The magic words halt, interrupted for a moment. The dry fire echoes in the newborn silence of the chamber. Aladdin examines the muzzle of the revolver with a quizzical look as Jafar looks down hesitantly, sweat beading upon his brow. Aladdin slumps against him, still grasping Jafar's goatee.

ZZzzz... ZZzzz...

Everyone in the room heaves a deep sigh of relief. Aladdin is asleep, face buried in the midsection of Jafar's court robes.

"Carpet! Get him out of here!" Genie shouts. The carpet zooms in and nestles under his body, carrying the dozing Aladdin off somewhere to sleep off what's sure to be a hangover to remember, and another one of his furies upon awakening, no doubt to be directed at the same friends who helped him from what would assuredly have been a stupendous feat of stupidity.

TIP

tipdickler was a freelance artist working for the ghetto gazette. he had no money and not a thing roinking around in his no nothing brain.

tip dickler first noticed it when he was on his way to the office. he was about to get on the escalator when an old man rushed past him and almost stepped on his shoes in a hurry to get on first. naturally ol' tip was more than a little miffed, but he was on Night Jewel 7 and didn't speak the alien world's language so he just stepped on the escalator and waited patiently

about this time ol' tip started thinking about how if he could have one superpower it would be the ability to make escalators go faster. Suddenly tip noticed something strange. He could have sworn that when he got on the escalator that the jabroni in front of him had been two steps higher. But now, tip was standing on the step directly behind the man. strange he thought, I could've sworn it was two. I always leave one step between me and the person ahead, so this doesn't make any sense. But maybe i was so miffed that i choked, and forgot that one very important rule.

later that month, tip was riding the longest escalator in the universe at pleasure mall BJ12 when suddenly he skipped ahead more than a single stair, and was then riding in front of the person who had been before him just a moment ago. He had looked down at his iphone 7 to check a message from a girl he was trying to get a date with. "sorry i can't go out with you tomorrow, i am now dead" it said. The next thing tip knew, he was at least five steps higher and had completely overtaken the bewildered young lady who was now standing behind him.

"What's your problem bitch?!" tip didn't know what to say but for some reason that was the first thing that came to mind. tip turned around and smiled. Good one, he thought to himself.

Well, as you can guess, things didn't get much better. Soon tip was zipping up escalator stairs like a escalator bobcat. Tip was enjoying himself so much he barely even insulted his pet zipper monkey anymore. Without a care and a mischevious grin on his face, tip would zoom up and up. knocking into shoppers with bags, people eating hot dogs, kids tying their shoes, all sorts.

Finally though, about one earth month later, tip bounced the wrong guy. Turns out he was a thug from the escalator yakuza. Well, this jerk didn't much care for tip's cocky attitude and ripped out tip's spine and vaporized the rest of him with his heat vision.

TO BE CONCLUDED (How Had He Not Noticed It Before)

"CPS on, flow established, nozzle activated, how's your pressure launchpad?"

"Pressure's good, over."

"Roger that. Starting regulation, got a blip on the Sally hose here?"

"Thump it with your thumb and forefinger, that should do it, over"

"Roger, Sally hose nominal. Looks like it'll be a clean burn"

Buzz stared at the back of his commander's helmet. Right beneath the stars and stripes was the word that gave him calm. Buzz couldn't be any more proud to be on this mission with the real, live American hero, Neal Armstrong. Buzz had once heard that he'd held his breath for over two and a half whole minutes!

"Check your Nosey, Nicholas. Can you give me a reading?"

"Roger ground control, 15 over 220, lookin' good"

"... Hold on, we're getting a message from the Lions of Zion of the Crew of the Iniquitous Scion... Sounds like you're showing a bit of cool-off in the St. Martin's realm. Could you check and see what the temp gauges are reading?"

Fixed into position like this, Buzz couldn't help but feel a glimmer of anxiety. It was a powerful, clear Florida morning with the sky a paler shade of blue than he'd ever known. Not a cloud, nor a bird nor an Imperial Destroyer in the sky. The best men Buzz had ever known, men he trusted more than his wife, his unclean deceitful wife, were down there on the tarmac making sure that everything went off without a hitch. Or, in the case that there was a hitch, that nothing went off at all. Still, strapped in as he was, Buzz still had that anxious twinge in his periphery.

"Okay, Zion crew's reporting a stabilization in the Oppenheimer continuum. Go ahead with your final checks and we'll see about getting this bird off the ground."

"OK. CBS on, UAE on, dense applicator field ... check, um, ODB on, LSD, PCP on, mega laser go, foghorn on..."

"That's a go" replied ground control.

"Nickelback on..." Indeed it was, Chad Kroeger's deep baritone "This is how you remind me ..." reverberating through the cabin.

"Higby field stable, transverse energy coupler stable, TWA stable, cross checking the dark zone, dark zone on..."

Buzz was beginning to feel a very slight perspiration accumulating in his suit. This was it, he thought, the last sequence.

"This is Commander Armstrong, about to give the final sequence. Are you reading me ground?"

"We read you, go ahead." came the response over rumbling engines.

"This is the grape, that grows on the vine. This is the hallowed circumstance, ours and thine. In the perishing flame does grow an unquiet path. At once light and sealed. In the space between utterance and swallowed by dust, he produces a syllable. Standing still for the breadth, in which the light rises and falling a blue crow doth shriek its death. In that time that encompasses all time, that budding dew upon the collar, so I give mine, complete, unending, emerald being..."

"Sequeunce complete, sending go-ahead!" As was the procedure, the ground crew responded, their neural pathways telepathically hi-jacked by Cape Canaveral's War Computer. "We're giving the go ahead to start countdown sequence. Prepare for lift-off"

Good, thought Buzz. Everything A-OK.

In the next moment, immediately following this transmission, the CD ended and a new one began. Over the growing noise of the engines, you couldn't hear it spinning to life. Buzz knew what was next.

* * *

10...

Buzz looked at the back of his commander's helmet. Smooth, hard and white and at once slick and reflective, Buzz felt that sheen absorb him. He was a cocoon, wrapped in the paraphernalia of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration safely restricting his movements.

9...

Buzz had enough ambulation left to glance to his side. There was Michael Collins. Staring straight ahead.

8...

Knowing that lift-off would be hell on his constitution, Buzz looked back ahead. He felt reassured by that name, in stately capitals.

7...

Wait a second, Buzz blinked. He tried counting on all his fingers.

6...

For the first time Buzz noticed something different, how had he not noticed it before? Along with the august family name floating in front of him came a dread detail that hadn't reared its ugly face before.

5...

Panic soon rose. His body phased, wanting out. He jerked and twitched, but encumbered as he was, there was little Buzz could do but move his gaze desperately over to plead with Collins, who had his eyes tightly shut accompanied by silent mouthings of what could have been a heathen prayer.

4...

Buzz could read it clearly now in the black lettering that had once reassured him, some clear violation of reality that perverted all sense of his well trained adherence to reason. Palpably aware of the immediate and catastrophic danger that pervaded, Buzz's mental circuits shorted out and his body became an epileptic meltdown of the right hemisphere.

3...

Gimme-Fue-ue-ue-ue **Click* Gimm-*sputter*-me-fire-
Gimme*splork*splunk*that which I-zzzt-Desire!

Overtop of the CD, Commander Collins could tell that something very real was wrong to his right.

2...

Forcing his vision in that direction, Collins saw, the dilated and vacant pupils of the lunar module pilot Buzz Aldrin fade to a glazed over vacuum. Collins' soul iced over into an ancient barren tundra. Against all notions of self-preservation, against all the sheer force of his will, Collins slowly turned his gaze toward the front of the fuselage, noticing the breach of actuality personified in those imposing characters.

"L. ARMSTRONG"

1...

Spinning around rapidly from his seat. Louis Armstrong ripped off his helmet, jammed his trumpet against his lips, adjusted his armiture and screamed, "SURPRISE!" before blasting on his trumpet directly in Command Module Pilot Michael Collins face.

LIFT OFF!

TO BE CONCLUDED...

